



Claxton Middle School

4 North College Street

Claxton, GA 30417

Principal: Diane Holland

As Claxton staff has worked hard to align their work with the Georgia performance standards over the past few years, they have made the move toward more in-depth focus on fewer topics. Teachers say they now have more time to do performance tasks and provide support for all students to become proficient in grade-level mathematics.

- ◆ Middle (6–8)
- ◆ 47% Black
- ◆ 41% White
- ◆ 12% Hispanic
- ◆ 75% Free or Reduced-Price Lunch
- ◆ 4% English Language Learners
- ◆ 17% Special Education

The school uses a core text supplemented by instructional units that they developed as a district along with many types of support materials. Teachers are guided by a curriculum map and district-developed vertical pacing guide. The school provides intense support to prepare students for algebra in grade 8, a course that now all eighth grade students take — a five-fold increase over previous years. The course addresses approximately 80% of the topics of a high school Algebra I course.

Claxton teachers believe the strength of the mathematics instruction at the middle school is the quality of the teaching staff, and they talk about building a culture of strong math teaching. From a teacher: “I think that our love for math [as a staff] plays a positive role . . . because none of us are teaching math because there was just an opening in math, all of us teach math because it’s truly what we want to teach, and we wouldn’t teach any other subject, except for math. And I can say that for all six of our grade-level teachers.”

In addition to using a core text, the Claxton staff has built in consistency in the delivery of mathematics lessons. All teachers use a structured lesson design, the Six Elements of an Effective Math Lesson (drill, review, instruction, processing, application, homework). They are guided by the Tennessee Instructional Method (I Do, We Do, You Do), which emphasizes modeling, guided practice, and independent practice every lesson.

Teachers are consistent even in their encouragement and expectation strategies. They require all students to correct mistakes 100% of the time on tests, during class work, on homework, and so forth. All teachers employ the praise-prompt-leave strategy to scaffold learning and encourage students to work through challenging mathematics problems. “A little strategy that we like to use is praise, prompt, and leave: we give them a little bit of praise for their effort, we give them a prompt to get them through the next step, and we leave and go work with another student, and we come back to them and check to see what they’ve accomplished while we were gone. And that

encourages them, and it can help them through the next step, quite often they can go on, you know, without you.”

The school has several classroom sets of laptops for practice, smart boards, smart tables, and websites that align with class work. Teachers use a lot of different types of groupings, including small groups, partners, dialogue, cooperative learning, peer tutors, as well as more traditional teaching. During instruction, teachers employ hands-on practical demonstrations and activities that engage students who are struggling with mathematics. Staff members have developed their own website for homework, extra links for practice, and current units of study.

Staff members are very quick to intervene with struggling students and have lots of ways of looking at formative data for reteaching, regrouping, referring students for an extra period of assistance daily, and tutoring. The staff is guided by a four-tier pyramid of interventions to determine appropriate support for individual students. In the daily schedule, mathematics is taught during a 100-minute block. Students who are targeted for more intervention have an additional 90 minutes of math (extended learning time); or some, depending on need, have an additional 45 minutes daily. Frequent formative assessment ensures that there will be fluid movement across supports.

Collaboration is the constant. From Claxton’s principal: “I think our collaboration would be something that other schools would be interested in seeing, our common planning, our common collaboration, our common units, common assessments ... we sit down together and we discuss not only our plans for the week, but the progress of the students, and those targeted students, we discuss them each and every time, and talk about how that child might learn a certain topic a little bit better.”